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NSC BRIEFING

15 January 1958

VENEZUELA (*Long form*)

- I. President Perez' tenure now appears to depend on the outcome of the power struggle in progress among the military.
- A. The armed forces were probably responsible for the shakeup in the cabinet on 10 January.
1. The ousting of National Security Chief Estrada and Minister of Interior Vallenilla, removed Perez' strongest civilian supporters who were long resented by the military.
 2. Perez admitted that changes were in accordance with military wishes.
 3. The Army commander who was arrested on the day before the revolt, has reportedly been released.
- B. Perez, however, *appears to have temporarily reassessed* ~~is now evidently trying to reassert~~ his authority over the armed forces and the nation.
1. He has taken personal charge of the defense ministry, replacing General Fernandez, former armed forces chief of staff who was appointed to this post only three days earlier.
 - (a) Fernandez may have been pressing his ambitions and attempting to seize power. He is now in exile in the Dominican Republic.

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2. Perez has appointed a civilian Perez Vivas, an apparently staunch supporter and relative, to ministry of interior as a replacement for General Llovera, who resumes his former position as minister of communications.

(a) Llovera may have thrown his support to Perez to effect the ouster of Fernandez.

3. The former navy and air force commanders were removed from their new political positions and several officers reportedly were arrested apparently in connection with Perez' bid to restore his authority.

II. The crisis in Venezuela seems likely to continue for an extended period.

A. Disunity continues in the armed forces.

1. General Fernandez' ouster evidences the power struggle now in progress among the officer class.

2. Discontented military elements, including the followers of Fernandez and other discredited officers, may unite to contest for power with the ruling military group.

B. Perez seems determined to retain power.
1. The junior officers may back him.

C. The formerly passive civilian opposition may seek to take advantage of military discord, which could touch off serious violence.

1. Sizeable public demonstrations were staged against the

Perez dictatorship in Caracas on 10 and 13 January.
+14
Additional demonstrations are reportedly being planned.

2. The Church, which has become increasingly hostile to the regime, may not be appeased by the government's recent

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3. Students and the press have defied the government.
 4. Former President Betancourt, exiled leader of the outlawed Democratic Action, has announced that the three principal opposition parties (does not include communists) have agreed to unite their efforts to oust Perez.
- D. The rebels who flew to Colombia are low-ranking officers and are unlikely to play a significant role in future developments.